

# Digging Around Listowel

## The Archaeology of the N69 Bypass



Banner image: Excavating a burnt spread at Garryantanvally



Thatched vernacular farm-house, Lisselton, Co. Kerry (1938)  
© National Folklore Collection A015.18.00759  
(photographer: Gaolmhín Ó Danachair)



Drone image of 19th-century house site at Curraghatoosane



AMS archaeologists at work on the N69 Listowel



View of back-filled test trenches in Garryantanvally on the N69 Listowel (2019)

### An Old House at Curraghatoosane

At Curraghatoosane we found the remains of a traditional two-roomed thatched house that was occupied from the early 19th century until the 1950s. The house was typical of many in the area at this time and had walls built from stone and mud with earthen floors and a large central hearth. The house was surrounded by neat cobble-lined drains that channelled water away from the walls. In the twentieth century the earthen floors were replaced with more modern concrete floors. We found a large quantity of artefacts belonging to the inhabitants of the house including pottery fragments, buttons, nails from the roof, a thimble and a child of Prague statue. Using historical documents, including the 1901 and 1911 censuses, we were able to establish that the house was occupied by the O'Connor family from the 1850s to the 1950s. The last occupant of the house was William (Bill) O'Connor. He is still remembered by many neighbours in the area.



Pottery from Curraghatoosane 1

### Archaeological Test Excavations

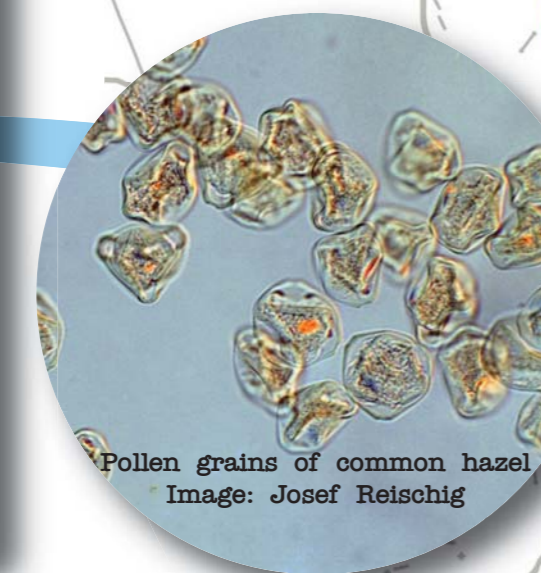
The purpose of archaeological test excavations is to identify whether previously unknown archaeological sites are present in an area prior to development. Testing of largescale road projects like the N69 Listowel Bypass entails archaeologists excavating a series of trenches within the greenfield areas of the project with a tracked excavator. The testing establishes the nature and extent of any archaeological remains present. This enables strategies to be put in place to mitigate the impact of the development on the archaeology before construction commences.

### Making Medieval Charcoal

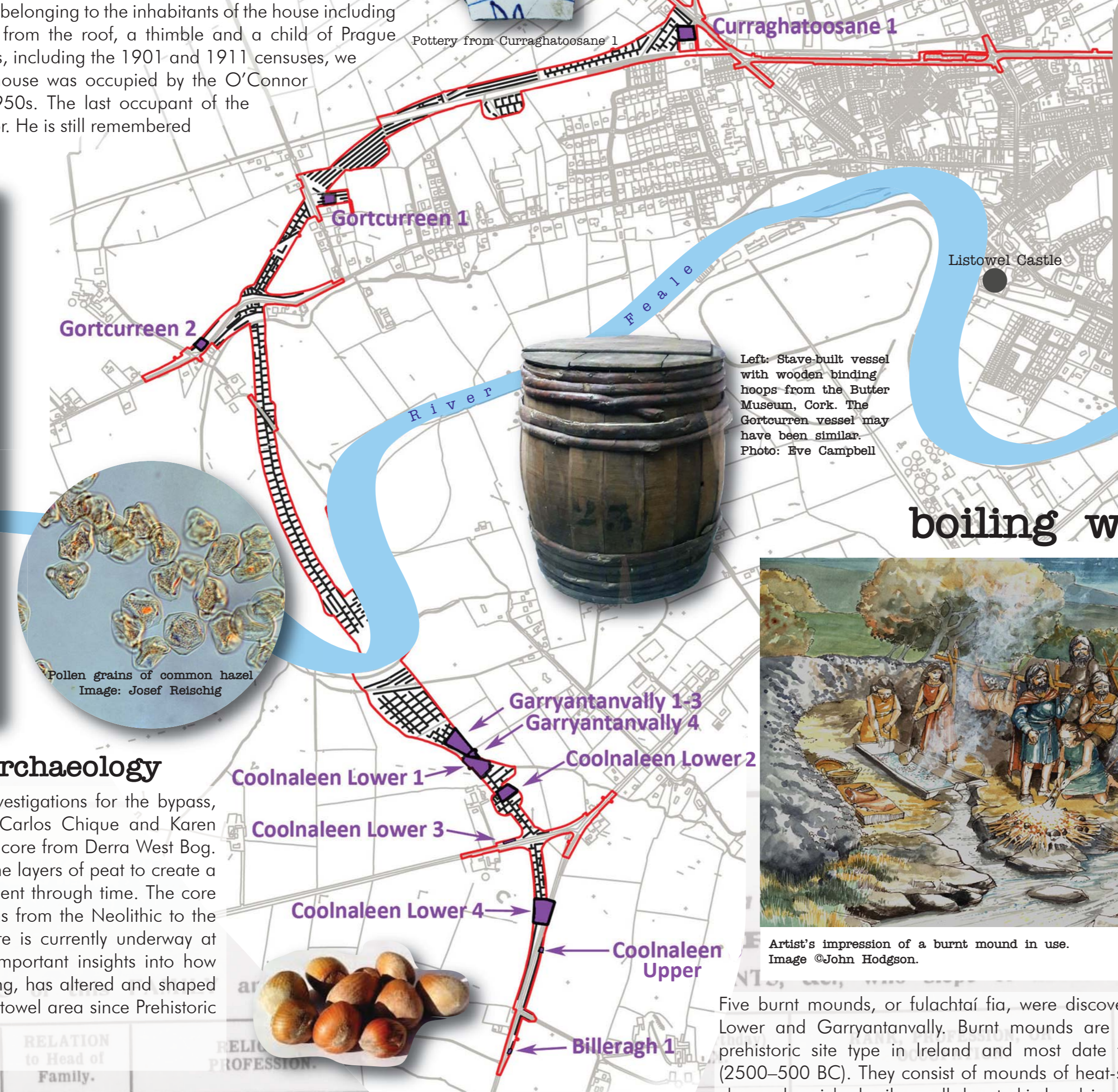
At Coolnaleen Lower we found several charcoal pit kilns. Charcoal was an important fuel for metal working because it can reach the high temperatures (1000°C) needed to smelt both bronze and iron. It is made from burning wood in an oxygen controlled environment. In the past, charcoal was produced in special kilns. Pit kilns were the simplest kind. Wood was stacked in the pit, covered with vegetation and earth, and burned over a number of days to make charcoal. Pit kilns mostly date to the medieval period.



Pollen coring at Derra West Bog, Listowel, Co. Kerry



Pollen grains of common hazel  
Image: Josef Reischig



Left: Stave-built vessel with wooden binding hoops from the Butter Museum, Cork. The Gortcurreen vessel may have been similar.  
Photo: Eve Campbell

### Fulachtaí fia - boiling water, building community



Artist's impression of a burnt mound in use.  
Image ©John Hodgson.



Archaeologists excavating a burnt mound at Coolnaleen Lower 1



Drone image of Coolnaleen Lower 1 under excavation

### Environmental Archaeology

As part of the archaeological investigations for the bypass, palaeoenvironmental specialists Carlos Chique and Karen Molloy from NUIG took a pollen core from Derra West Bog. The team use pollen trapped in the layers of peat to create a picture of the changing environment through time. The core taken from Derra West Bog spans from the Neolithic to the 17th century. Analysis of the core is currently underway at NUIG. The results will provide important insights into how human activity, particularly farming, has altered and shaped the natural environment of the Listowel area since Prehistoric times.

### From the Bog: Worked Timbers and Wooden Vessel



In the townland of Gortcurreen, at the site of Gortcurreen 1, a group of worked timbers and the remains of a stave-built wooden vessel were discovered in boggy ground. All of the timbers appear to have been dumped here in the past and were preserved in the peat. The most significant of the timbers were three large structural beams containing numerous mortices along their lengths. These timbers are possible wall plates or floor support beams from a large structure. What remained of the stave-built vessel comprised 25 staves, part of a wooden binding hoop and parts of the wooden base. The date of the timbers and vessel were not clear during the excavation and it is hoped that upcoming scientific analysis, including dendrochronological and radiocarbon dating, will help us to further understand where the timbers came from and why they might have been dumped at this location.

Five burnt mounds, or fulachtaí fia, were discovered in Coolnaleen Lower and Garryantanvally. Burnt mounds are the most common prehistoric site type in Ireland and most date to the Bronze Age (2500–500 BC). They consist of mounds of heat-shattered stone and charcoal-enriched soil, usually located in low-lying, marshy areas close to a stream or spring. Troughs (for heating water), as well as hearths, stakehole alignments and pits, are often found next to or beneath the mounds. They are generally thought to have been cooking places, but may also have served other functions. Multiple purposes are certainly indicated at Coolnaleen Lower 1. Joints of meat could have been cooked in the three wood-lined troughs uncovered here, while the discovery of a wood-and-stone bench, built into the side of a 4 m wide pit, suggests the site may also have been used for communal bathing, or perhaps as a sauna. A small number of stone artefacts, including a shale axehead, were also found at this site.



#### Mini-documentaries

Two mini-documentaries were created as part of cataloguing the archaeological works on the N69 Listowel Bypass Project. Click on the QR code to watch. Each video lasts for just over 10 minutes.



Shale axe from Coolnaleen Lower 1

NAME AND SURNAME.	RELATION to Head of Family.	RELIGION.	PROFESSION.	AGE.
69	Son	Roman Catholic	Roads Write	32
37	Daughter	Roman Catholic	Roads write	27
			Farmer's son single	
			Do daughter single	
				60 Kerry

AMS National Road Design Office Kerry NRDO An Roinn Iompair Turasoireachta agus Spóirt Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport TII

Poster by Eve Campbell & Tony Bartlett (Archaeological Management Solutions)